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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 3 February 1995, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. HITAM (Malaysia)

CONTENTS

STATEMENT BY MR. NIELSON, MINISTER FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION OF DENMARK

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The meeting was called to order at 3.55 p.m.

STATEMENT BY MR. NIELSON, MINISTER FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION OF DENMARK

1. The CHAIRMAN invited the Minister for Development Cooperation of Denmark to address the Commission.

2. Mr. NIELSON (Denmark) said that, since the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the international community had progressed further in setting new standards for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms by means of various instruments and declarations. Regrettably, however, millions of people throughout the world were still deprived of basic human rights and freedoms.

3. For decades that situation had been be attributed to the cold war which divided the world. Instead of a new and better world, however, the end of the cold war had brought with it ethnic conflicts, social disintegration of States and religious intolerance, causing immeasurable human suffering and chaos in various parts of the world. In some countries, no international standards or efforts had been able to stem the tide of human aggression, hatred and rivalries.

4. In the wake of the tragedy in Bosnia, the futile attempt to solve the conflict in Chechnya by violent means was still being pursued at the cost of indescribable human suffering. Denmark was appalled by the disproportionate use of force and its impact on the civilian population of Chechnya. It condemned the massive human rights violations that were taking place and appealed to the parties to stop the fighting.

5. There was no need, however, to despair and to give up hope of a better world. The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights was truly a milestone in that it had reaffirmed that the promotion and protection of human rights was a legitimate concern of the international community and that national sovereignty could therefore never be used as an excuse for the violation of basic human rights and freedoms.

6. His Government welcomed the appointment of a High Commissioner for Human Rights and endorsed the conclusions of his first report to the General Assembly. The actions of the High Commissioner had helped to create a new basis for a continuing dialogue on human rights problems, strengthened the willingness of the various actors to deal constructively with human rights issues and consolidated the determination of States to assist and support United Nations human rights programmes. It was essential, therefore, for adequate human and financial resources to be allocated to the High Commissioner's Office so as to enable him to play the central role envisaged in his broad mandate. In addition, the Member States must demonstrate the political will to assist the High Commissioner in the performance of his important tasks.

7. The need for adequate resources also applied to the entire United Nations human rights apparatus, especially the Centre for Human Rights, including its important programme of technical cooperation. The Centre had been operating

for years under severe budgetary constraints, while its workload had dramatically increased. His Government strongly supported the increase in resources for the Centre that had been recommended in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. At the same time, however, the Centre needed to improve its efficiency and to develop clear and unequivocal management structures.

8. The international community was currently faced with a paradox. On the one hand, trade and communication links had created a more interdependent world while, on the other hand, many people around the world were manifesting a desire to safeguard their special historical, cultural or religious identities. Understandable though it might be, that desire often resulted in excessive nationalism, racism and intolerance towards other people. The international community had therefore urgently to find ways and means of educating people to respect and honour their fellow human beings.

9. The contemporary world was characterized by a deep gap between the rich and the poor, both within countries and between countries. Poverty, hunger and lack of the most basic human needs were often used as excuses to suppress fundamental human rights and freedoms. While it must be recognized that the existence of widespread poverty inhibited the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, poverty and other forms of distress should never be invoked to justify the abridgement of internationally recognized human rights. The forthcoming World Summit for Social Development should provide an opportunity to discuss how respect for human rights, democracy and development could contribute to social justice for all peoples.

10. The significance of the Summit would have to be measured by the follow-up action taken. His Government was committed to working for an integrated follow-up within the United Nations system to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. Taken together, those conferences represented important steps towards finding comprehensive solutions to the complex and vital issues which the world's societies currently faced.

11. Turning to the Commission's own agenda, he noted the prominent place accorded to the implementation of economic and social rights. His Government took the view that the common starting-point for the discussions should be the concept of the right to development. The World Conference on Human Rights had reaffirmed the right to development as a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights. As such, it must be broadly defined to include social, cultural, political, technological and environmentally sound development. Moreover, democracy, good governance and the full enjoyment of human rights were indicators of and prerequisites for development in its broadest sense.

12. The central subject of development was the human being and each individual had the right to enjoy the fruits of development. For their part, Governments had the obligation to strive towards the realization of that right on behalf of their citizens. The international community also had an

obligation to assist in that process. As its contribution, Denmark had, in previous years, devoted about 1 per cent of its annual GDP to development assistance and intended to continue to do so in the future.

13. Some of the most disadvantaged groups in contemporary world society were the indigenous peoples, who often belonged to the poorest part of the population and were subjected to various forms of discrimination. He noted with satisfaction, therefore, that the international community had come to recognize the value and diversity of the distinct identities and cultures of indigenous peoples and that serious efforts were to be made within the framework of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People to preserve their special identities and protect their rights. His Government attached high priority to the goals of the Decade and would support further work by the United Nations in that area.

14. To prevent the Decade from becoming a hollow gesture, however, a breakthrough was essential on two major issues, namely, a draft declaration on indigenous rights and the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples. Fortunately, the prospects for progress on both issues seemed good.

15. The horrible practice of torture still continued in many countries, under the pretext that it was a necessary tool for combating terrorism or other similar acts. He wished to emphasize that freedom from torture was a right which must be protected under all circumstances, including times of internal or international disturbance or armed conflicts. His Government attached great importance to the work carried out both within the United Nations and by non-governmental organizations with a view to providing assistance to the victims of torture.

16. The promotion of respect for human rights was, in the first place, a legal problem requiring the definition and codification of rights in the form of laws and treaties. Secondly, it was a political problem requiring enforcement action by the State which had freely accepted to respect such rights vis-à-vis its own citizens. Lastly, human rights represented a social challenge which required the development of public opinion.

17. The problems and challenges facing the international community in the post-cold-war world required international cooperation and it was in that context that Denmark would submit its candidacy for election to the Commission in the second quarter of 1995.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.